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Ball Suggests NATO Tackle Tough Issues

Shape and Survival Of Alliance Are Underlying Theme

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The Washington Post Foreign Service

LONDON, May 11—Under Secretary of State George Ball invited the NATO allies today to start thinking seriously about the future of the alliance, and perhaps to face up to its hardest questions by the annual December meeting.

The clear implication, though he did not say so, was to put the issue of whether France is going to quit and whether and how the alliance might survive without France.

This issue of the alliance itself, though always delicately expressed, was the underlying theme of most speeches on the opening day of the NATO foreign ministers' session here. There were no answers to the key questions, but a stream of warnings and of demands, from the Europeans, for more and closer crisis consultations by the United States.

France was strictly correct and nonprovocative, even agreeing to compromise slightly to ease the current strain on relations with Bonn.

British Foreign Minister Michael Stewart informed the

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NATO Council that agreement had been reached on a German unification declaration last night during the dinner meeting of French, German and British foreign ministers and Ball.

Ball, who has been substituting for Secretary of State Dean Rusk, will fly back to Washington early Wednesday morning on the plane which is bringing Rusk to London.

The Western Big Four declaration on Germany was a last-minute compromise which came as a surprise. Before the dinner, German Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder had been saying that Bonn was no longer pressing for a joint statement because it would rather have none than another painful disagreement.

President de Gaulle has taken the public stand that the German problem should be settled by Germany's neighbors. This was flatly unacceptable to Bonn, as well as to Washington, as it implied that America's role was irrelevant, even underisable.

Compromise On Germany

Then, Monday night, Maurice Couve de Murville accepted a formula saying that a solution of the German problem was "necessary not only in the interests of the German people who seek reunification but in the interests of all the European peoples as well as other peoples concerned." The last six words of the French foreign minister were the addition that made the compromise — miniscule but enough to please the worried Germans and therefore satisfactory to the United States.

The declaration, to be published at another point to "the obligations and responsibilities in Germany . . . devolving upon" the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

Nobody took it as a change of heart from Paris, but rather a gesture to take a little of the edge off French-Ger-Gaule visits Chancellor Erhard in Bonn next month.

The uncertainties about the fate of 16-year-old alliance were scarcely alleviated.

There was, in fact, a growing tendency among the foreign ministers to speak more openly and bluntly of its problems. This was a reversal of the practice in the last few years of saying less about what worried members most, in hopes of avoiding open splits.

Britain's Prime Minister Wilson, delivering the first speech at the formal opening ceremony in Whitehall's ornate banquet hall, spoke out harshly about one-sided U.S. domination of the allied arms market, about Bonn's reluctance to help support the cost of Britain's garrisons in Germany and — though without the name France's policies on Europe, the alliance and nuclear power status.

Wilson Speaks

"The need for our alliance is as great today as it has ever been," he said. "We cannot afford to drop our guard, or permit ourselves the luxury of disagreements which could imperil the cohesion of our alliance," he said.

There could be no effective independent nuclear power outside the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Wilson added, warning that nowadays "no nation, however great, can think in terms of going it alone, without allies and without regard to world opinion."

Practically every speech, except that of France's Couve de Murville, stressed the same thought that far from being outmoded by the lesser degree of East-West tensions in Europe, the alliance was still urgently required.

This was pleasing to the United States. But, at the same time, practically every speech made a point of calling for more consultation, especially on crisis management. This was a way of saying that the United States is still nowhere near being as equal, intimate and even considerate a partner as the others wish.